

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT	
Project Name: Installation of underground telecommunications cables.	Proposed Implementation Date: 2016
Proponent: Triangle Communications, PO Box 1140, Havre, MT 59501	
Type and Purpose of Action: The applicant proposes to install two (2) underground telecommunications cables in the same trench within a right-of-way 20' wide (10' on either side of a centerline) across School Trust land in Blaine County. These cables will be "knifed in" (entrenched using machinery that requires very little digging, usually a line about 12" wide at most) along/adjacent to the right-of-way granted to Montana Dept. of Transportation for a State highway. The cable will allow for improved telecommunication capabilities in this rural area and the surrounding communities.	
Location: W2SW4, SW4NW4 Section 36, Township 26N, Range 23E	County: Blaine

I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT	
1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.	Mike Zook, ROW agent for Triangle Communications, sent a complete application to install the cable to Lisa Axline, ROW supervisor in Helena. The application was provided to the Montana Sage-Grouse Oversight Team (MSGOT) for approval and recommendations for stipulations in order to comply with executive orders 12-2015 and 21-2015. The application was then forwarded on to the Glasgow Unit Office, where staff have reviewed and processed the application.
2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:	No other governmental agencies have jurisdiction over this project as it pertains to School Trust lands. Montana DNRC, Real Estate Management Bureau has jurisdiction over the project.
3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:	Action Alternative: Grant permission to Triangle Communications to install the underground telecommunications cable on School Trust land.  No Action Alternative: Deny permission

	to Triangle Communications to install the underground telecommunications cable on School Trust land.
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II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS
<p>4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE: Are fragile, compatible or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations?</p>	<p>The area of impact contains a Cabba-Windham complex of soils which is comprised of well-drained loams and gravelly loams on steep slopes. It also contains a Barkof-Windham complex which consists of deep, well-drained silty clay on moderately steep slopes. These soils are not fragile or unstable. There is increased susceptibility to erosion, rutting and general disturbance to the soil during wet/rainy periods.</p> <p>Action Alternative: There will be some soil disturbance due to the digging (knifing) required to install the cable underground. The area of impact has already seen significant disturbance in the past, with the installation of the highway directly adjacent.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no changes to soils on the State land.</p>
<p>5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION: Are important surface or groundwater resources present? Is there potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality?</p>	<p>There are no important water resources present within the area of impact. There is no potential for impact on drinking water in the area.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The proposed cable installation would not negatively impact the quality, quantity and distribution of water.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative, there will be no impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution.</p>

## II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

6. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?

This project is not influenced by any air quality regulations or zones. A short-term increase in vehicle traffic will result in a slight increase in dust. No pollutants will be produced.

Action Alternative: This type of project on the State land will have minimal impact to the air quality. Some dust may occur due to vehicle use.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to air quality.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?

The current vegetative community consists primarily of non-native grasses. The project would have very little impact on the vegetative community due to the knifing process used to install the cable. No rare plants or cover types are present.

Action Alternative: Vegetation would see some "trampling" from vehicle use, but the actual digging required for installation of the cable will leave a very small area where vegetation is destroyed.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to the plant communities on the State land.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?

The School Trust land provides habitat for upland birds, elk and deer. There is very little potential for recreation (hunting) on this School Trust land.

Action Alternative: The area of impact is small and will only degrade habitat for a short period. Any impacts during digging will be small and will be mitigated quickly with regrowth of vegetation.

No Action Alternative: Under this

## II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	<p>alternative there will be no impacts to the possible use of the State land as wildlife habitat.</p>
<p>9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Sensitive Species or Species of special concern?</p>	<p>The area of impact is within short-grass prairie habitat that is important nesting habitat for migratory songbirds and upland birds. No wetlands are within the area of impact. Species of concern seasonally/potentially present in the area include: Black-tailed prairie dog, Spotted Bat, Black-footed ferret, Greater Sage-Grouse and Eastern Ringtail dragonfly. Due to much of the project's location being within Core or General Greater Sage-Grouse habitat as classified by the MSGOT, the project was reviewed by MSGOT and some stipulations were added to the proposed project so as to comply with executive orders 12-2015 and 21-2015.</p> <p>Action Alternative: Installation of the cable on School Trust land will degrade habitat temporarily. These impacts will be mitigated quickly with regrowth of vegetation during the next growing season.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to the environmental resources.</p>
<p>10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?</p>	<p>A cultural resource inventory was prepared by Ethnoscience, Inc. and provided to Triangle Communications. The area of impact contains no historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The proposed cable will have no impact on historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impact to historical or archaeological sites under this alternative.</p>

## II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

11. AESTHETICS: Is the project on a prominent topographic feature? Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas? Will there be excessive noise or light?

The proposed cable installation will have minimal impact on the aesthetics of the area. The area of impact is directly adjacent to a State highway, so the project will be visible to the public. Noise levels may increase slightly due to increased vehicle traffic, but there will be no excessive levels of noise or light.

Action Alternative: Minimal short-term impacts to the aesthetics of the School Trust land are expected.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to aesthetics associated with the School Trust land.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY: Will the project use resources that are limited in the area? Are there other activities nearby that will affect the project?

Environmental resources in the area are not specifically limited and are not affected by the proposed project. No nearby activities will affect the project.

Action Alternative: The proposed cable installation will place no additional demands on any environmental resources in the area.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no demands placed on environmental resources of land, water, air or energy.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?

There are currently no other studies, plans or projects on this tract.

Action Alternative: This project will not impact any other plans or studies that Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation has on the School Trust land.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to the plans or studies that Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation has on the School Trust

## II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

land.

## III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?	<p>The operation and movement of heavy equipment and vehicles has inherent risks that are not impacted by access across the School Trust land.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The installation of the cable would slightly increase the risk of fire during the project due to increased vehicle traffic.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to human health or safety.</p>
15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?	<p>The area of impact is too close to the State highway to be effectively used for agriculture activities (grazing).</p> <p>Action Alternative: The disturbance to vegetation on the tract will have no economic impact on the agricultural activities on this tract.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to agricultural activities on the School Trust land.</p>
16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.	<p>Action Alternative: The project will not create nor impact any jobs in the area.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to quantity and distribution of employment under this alternative.</p>
17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?	<p>Action Alternative: The project will have no impacts on the local and state tax base and tax revenues.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the local and state tax</p>

	base under this alternative.
18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?	<p>Action Alternative: The project will increase traffic along the nearby highway during the course of the project. There would be no additional demand for governmental services.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no additional demand for government services.</p>
19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?	<p>There are no special management plans in effect on the School Trust land. It is managed for typical agricultural activities (livestock grazing).</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project has cleared State (DNRC) management plans.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no impacts to locally adopted environmental plans and goals.</p>
20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES: Are wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through this tract? Is there recreational potential within the tract?	<p>This tract has a small potential for upland bird, elk and deer hunting. This tract is within the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, so any recreational opportunities are managed by the Tribe.</p> <p>Action Alternative: No changes to public land access or recreational potential will occur.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the recreational values associated with the State land under this alternative.</p>
21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?	<p>Action Alternative: The project will not impact the density and distribution of population and housing.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the density and distribution of population and housing.</p>
22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is	Action Alternative: The project will

some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?	<p>not disrupt the traditional lifestyles of the local community.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the social structures under this alternative.</p>
23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?	<p>Action Alternative: The project will not impact the cultural uniqueness and diversity of this rural area.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the cultural uniqueness and diversity under this alternative.</p>
24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:	<p>This telecommunications cable is intended to provide greater telecommunication capabilities in the surrounding area/communities. This is a very rural area with limited capabilities at the moment.</p> <p>Action Alternative: Allowing installation of the cable across School Trust land would have little economic impact to the School Trust, but would provide surrounding communities with increased telecommunications capabilities.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to the social and economic circumstances under this alternative.</p>

EA Checklist Prepared By: s/Jack Medlicott Date: 3/29/2016  
Jack Medlicott Land Use Specialist

IV. FINDING	
25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:	Action alternative.
26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:	No significant impacts anticipated.
27. Need for Further Environmental Analysis:	



☐ EIS

☐ More Detailed EA

☒ No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By: Matthew Poole Glasgow Unit Manager  
Name Title

s/Matthew Poole\s Date: May 31, 2016  
Signature